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ABSTRACT

A study of the interlanguage of bilinguals and multilinguals compared the oral French proficiency of 20 native Swedish-speaking and 20 Finnish-speaking university students as evidenced in error patterns in oral tests. With the exception of phonological and phonetic errors in pronunciation, errors were classified by word class (article, noun, adjective, pronoun, numeral, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction), grammatical category (gender, number, determination, person, mood, tense), linguistic unit (morpheme, word, syntagme, phrase, vowel, consonant, group, syllable), nature of the error (substitution, omission, superfluous element, order), and linguistic level (morphological, syntactical, lexical, phonological, phonetic, suprasegmental). The error patterns suggest some specific points of divergence between the two student groups. The error patterns also suggest that the relative number of errors caused by native language interference in Finnish versus Swedish interlanguage is reduced because of the plurilingualism of many of the students; there are sources of error other than transfer; there are noticeable differences between students, related to personality; and the better marks obtained by Swedish-speaking students cannot be explained by the smaller number of errors they made. (MSE)

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Anja Elo

ON ERRORS MADE BY FINNISH-SPEAKING AND SWEDISH-SPEAKING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ORAL PRODUCTION IN FRENCH

The present paper is a by-product of a broader study of the interlanguages of Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking students of French. The aim of the global study is to find out the differences of the respective interlanguages of students at Åbo Akademi and at the University of Turku. It covers the areas of vocabulary and syntax as well as a textlinguistic study of cohesion and information flow. The corpus consists of approximately 20,000 words (20 students of Åbo Akademi and 20 of the University). It is an attempt to measure quantitatively the quality of the students' speech production. The idea of this study originated in the observation that the Swedish-speaking students obtained regurlarly better test results in a series of language ability tests made jointly at Åbo Akademi and the University of Turku.

Number and percentage of highest and lowest marks obtained by students of Åbo Akademi (ÅA) and of Turun Yliopisto (TY)

Mark (max 3)	ÅA N=112	%	TY N=175	%
3.00	15	13.40	4	0.85
2.75	7	6.25	8	1.70
2.50	10	8.95	15	3.60
0.50	1	0.90	12	2.55
0.25	2	1.80	8	1.70
0.00	—	—	3	0.65

Table 1.

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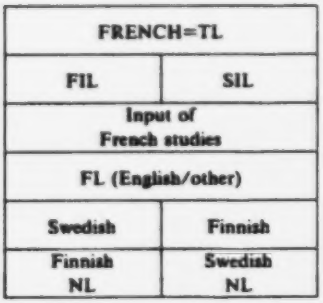
This case differs from traditional contrastive studies in that here it is not a question of bilingualism only, but of plurilingualism. The situation in Finland is comparable to that in Canada or Belgium where there are two official languages as well, even though in these countries both languages are Indo-European, which is not the case in Finland. However, the Finnish-speaking students cannot be said to be completely ignorant of Indo-European structures considering that according to the Finnish system of education, it is obligatory to study the other official language as well. In addition to this, most of the students have studied English and a few German. Thus they are familiar with grammatical categories such as articles, gender, etc. lacking in Finnish. The Swedish-speaking students respectively must have studied Finnish as required by the Finnish educational system. In addition, it is quite impossible to avoid contact with the other national language in Finland. Another factor reducing the differences in performance is the level of the students: they are all students of 'cum laude' (corresponding to 2–3 years of studies at the University) and thus their competence in French should be quite good.



FIL= the interlanguage of the Finnish-speaking group of students
SIL= the interlanguage of the Swedish-speaking group of students
TL= target language
NL= native language

It is generally agreed that attempting to compare two languages in their entirety is both impractical and wasteful; comparing three languages would be even more difficult. In this paper I will consider case by case the material which appears to be relevant. In general terms there are obvious

differences in the surface structures of Finnish, a Finno-Ugrian language, and of Swedish and French, both Indo-European languages, which are reviewed in the following:

The most striking is one the paradigmatic axis, in that French and Swedish use prepositions where Finnish has 15 different cases, the use of prepositions being very restricted in Finnish. While Finnish has postpositions and Swedish also has a few (prepositions that can be used as postpositions), French has none. Finnish makes no distinction in gender and has no articles, unless the forms of spoken Finnish are considered: 'se' or 'yks' or another deictic placed before a definite substantive in 50% of the cases.[1] In the verb paradigm Finnish and French conjugate the verbs in different persons while Swedish has one form for all persons. As for the use of tenses, Finnish and Swedish are nearer to each other than to French (ex.: Fi. 'Hän tuli eilen'; Sw. 'Han kom igår'; Fr. 'Il est venu hier'). In the perfect tenses Finnish and Swedish have one auxiliary only while French has two (être/avoir). In the category of personal pronouns Finnish differentiates human/non-human (hän/se) while French and Swedish make a distinction between genders (Fr. il/elle; Sw. han/hon). Swedish makes a distinction animate/inanimate (han/den, det). As for the use of pronouns, Swedish has 'det' in impersonal phrases ('det är bra', 'det regnar'); French has either 'il' ('il pleut'), 'ce' ('c'est bien') or 'cela' ('ça' in spoken language: 'Comment ça va'), Finnish has no pronoun ('sataa', 'on kylmä') or sometimes 'se' ('niinhän se on'), which is often used incorrectly in spoken language.

It is obvious that though Swedish has many features that correspond to French, there are also elements that prove to be 'false friends'. This can be seen especially in the choice of prepositions and in the vocabulary.

This paper deals with ERRORS made by the student in a test of oral production in French.[2] What is an 'error' in spoken French? I have considered all deviations from the normative grammar in the preliminary analysis of the corpus. What is the general norm in French is very difficult to determine because the French disagree on the matter. Besides it is more difficult to set up a norm for spoken language than to written language. I have consulted three native speakers of French to get confirmation for my views and I found out that in some cases their opinions differed. I have omitted those cases of error in which even one of them would have accep-

ted the expression. In some other cases I was able to understand what a student intended to express while it was not possible for a native speaker to understand the meaning of the expression. In some cases the context plays a decisive role in determining if a sentence is acceptable or not, as Enkvist has pointed out.[3] On the other hand, some errors cannot be noticed in spoken French because for instance many verbal endings are not pronounced and thus the correct choice of mood (indicative/subjunctive) or person (3rd singular/3rd plural) cannot be observed as in a written test.

In counting the errors I have considered the deviations from the grammatical norm done[4] with the total number of words used as a basis for comparison. In the discussion I will not deal with deviations that I consider as 'mistakes' due to the stressing test situation nor mistakes that the student himself has corrected immedeately (autocorrection). Disregarding the concept of communiation I have included errors which do not hinder the communication even though they can make it more difficult. If only instances of faulty or impossible communication were considered, there would be very little left for the error analyst.

	Total of Words	Errors	Mean no. of Words/student	Errors/student
ÅA	11 090	364	554	18
TY	10 290	434	514	21

Table 2.

In the table above are shown the no. of words versus the no. of errors in all, and the respective nos. per student. As a basis for the classification of errors I have used the typology of errors presented by Gheorghe Doca[5], with some modifications:

I Word class in which the error occurs:
article, noun, adjective (including the so-called adjective pronouns), pronoun, numeral, verb, adverb, preposition and conjunction.

II Grammatical category affected by the error:
gender, number, determination, person, mood, tense.

III Linguistic unit in which the error is manifested:
morpheme, word, syntagme, phrase, vowel, consonant, consonant group, syllable.

IV Comparison with the correct form in the target language, nature of the error:
substitution, omission, superfluous element, wrong order of elements.

V Linguistical level:
morphological, syntactical, lexical, phonological, phonetic, suprasegmental.

I have left out all phonological and phonetic errors if they have remained on the level of pronunciation. Instead, I have included the cases in which the masculine form of the adjective has been used for the feminine and vice versa ('une chose important' for 'importante').

The table below shows how different word classes have been affected by errors (%):

	SIL				FIL			
	1.	2.	3.	4.	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Articles	9	7	4.5	0	8	12	3	0
2. Nouns	6.5	0	0	1	8	1	1	0
3. Adjectives	9	0	0	1	9	0	1	1
4. Pronouns	4	1.5	0	0.5	6	3.5	1	1
5. Verbs	22	0	0	0	16	2	0	0
6. Adverbs	3	2	2	1	1	3	1	0.5
7. Preposition	11	7.5	2.5	0	8	6	3.5	0.5
8. Conjunctions	2	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

N.B.:
Horizontally: 1. substitution (choice of an erroneous element) 2. omission, 3. superfluous element, 4. wrong order of elements.

In the following I shall discuss the points that seem to be of importance.

1. Articles. The grammatical categories of article and gender are lacking in Finnish. However, there is no significant difference in the sub

stitution of the article (including the wrong choice of gender and species) between SIL and FIL. As for the omitting of the article there is a significant difference: in SIL 7% and in FIL 12% of errors are committed in this area. This can be interpreted as a case of interference, in that Finns tend to omit an element which does not exist in their NL. The errors made by the Swedish-speaking students could be explained by the fact that the rules of the use of the articles in their NL differ from those in French.

2. Nouns. It is quite interesting that there is no significant difference in the no. of errors in nouns in spite of the fact that the vocabulary common to French and Swedish is considerably vaster than that in common with Finnish.

3. Adjectives. In a further analysis I have made a distinction between the wrong choice and gender of adjective. In SIL there are 2.5% of wrong choice of adjective and 6.5% of wrong gender, in FIL 1.5% of choice of a wrong adjective and 7.5% of wrong gender. The difference between SIL and FIL is not very important in this case either.

4. Pronouns. The total no. of errors of pronouns in SIL is 6% and in FIL 11.5% which is almost double compared with SIL. As briefly mentioned in the introduction (p.75), the systems of pronouns show marked differences in the three languages in question, which can be illustrated by the following figure and examples:

	FTL	Sw.NL	Fi.NL
gender	+	+	-
animate	-	+	+
human	-	+	+

French	*Swedish*	*Finnish*
Qu'est-ce qu'*il* fait?	Vad gör *han*?	Mitä *hän* tekee?
Il chante.	*Han* sjunger.	Laulaa.
Il fait froid.	*Det* är kallt.	On kylmää.
C'est désagréable.	*Det* är obehagligt.	*Se* on epämiellyttävää.
Ça me rend triste.	*Det* gör mig ledsen.	*Se* tekee minut surulliseksi.

Finnish students make a wrong choice of pronoun and omit one clearly more often than the Swedish-speaking students, which seems to show analogy with the uses of NL.

5. Verbs. The errors in verbs are concentrated in both SIL and FIL in the same way (l. substitution) though the percentage of the no. of errors is higher in SIL than in FIL. Here as well, it appeared to be of interest to make a further distinction, that is the distinction between wrong choice of verb and of wrong form. The result was parallel in both groups: in SIL 11% of both types of error, in FIL 8% of both. The fact that the Swedish-speaking students make more errors in verbs is actually evidence of a tendency to use more complicated sentences and verbal constructions.

6. Adverbs. The use of adverbs does not seem to be a problematic point in learning French. Both groups have a small no. of all four types of error.

7. Prepositions. The most noticeable difference in the use of prepositions appears in a wrong choice: in SIL 11%, in FIL 8%. In SIL the great amount of substitution could be interpreted as a result of a negative transfer. This will be illustrated with more detail in the discussion of interference. The difference in the total no. of errors of prepositions (21% in SIL against 17% in FIL) may be a consequence of structurally more complicated sentences used by Swedish-speaking students.

8. Conjunctions. The percentage of errors in conjunctions may be insignificant (4% in SIL, 5% in FIL) because of the low frequency of conjunctions in the vocabulary. Another factor which keeps them down is the avoidance of complicated sentence structures.

Comparing the number of faults with the number of possible sources of error[6] could have been more accurate and revealing but it was not possible in this case because the process of computing has not been finalized yet.

In the second part of this paper I shall deal with the errors that can be explained particularly by transfer from the native language or from a foreign language other than French. Here I have consulted a native Swedish-speaking Finn when analyzing the sentences produced by Swedish-speaking students.

The numerical analysis proved to be more difficult in this case because of the intuitive character of the recognition of interference (English vs. Swedish) and because the underlying structures could be viewed in different ways.

It was not of interest to categorize the errors of interference in the same way as done in the previous part of this paper because the samples would have been very small. Thus I have classified them as syntactical (keeping prepositions and verb forms as separate classes) and lexical:

	SIL			FIL		
	NL	FL	Fi.	NL	FL	Sw.
1. Lexical	18	3		28	13	3
2. Syntactical	22	5		24	17	6
3. Prepositions	23	2	1	19	5	2
4. Person	12			17		
5. Mood	22			5		
6. Tense	8			11		
	N=116			N=150		
	32% of no.			35% of no.		
	of errors			of errors		

FL=English

Table 4.

1. Lexical transfer. The influence of NL is by far stronger than that of other languages, in this class as well as in the other classes as shown by the Table 4. Most cases in both groups are occurrences of contamination or calque.[7]

SIL:

"C'est assez difficile de *recevoir* des amis dans une grande ville".

Sw. Det är svårt att *få* vänner i en stor stad.
Fr. C'est difficile de se faire des amis (/faire des connaissances)...

2. "Les Finnois sont *l'envers*".
Sw. Finnarna är *tvärtom*.
Fr. C'est le *contraire* avec les Finnois.

3. "J'aime bien être *le seconde*. C'est *confortable*".
   Sw. Jag bor gärna tillsammans med *en annan*. Det är *trevligt*.
   Fr. J'aime bien compartir un appartement avec *une autre personne*. C'est *agréable*.

FIL:

1. "C'est *une place d'alimentation*".
   Fi. Se on *ruokailupaikka*.
   Fr. C'est *une cantine*.

2. "Je lis.. ce qui *vient de* la radio et *de* la télévision au soir.. les programmes".
   Fi. Luen, mitä *tulee* radio*sta* ja televisio*sta* illalla.. ohjelmat.
   Fr. Je lis ce qu'on *a à* la radio et *à* la télévision le soir.. les programmes.

3. "Le mardi je *danse le jazz-ballet*".
   Fi. Tiistaisin *tanssin jazzballettia*.
   Fr. Le mardi je *fais du jazz-ballet*.

The psycholinguistic mechanisms appear to be alike in both groups in that most of the wrong words are direct translations from NL.

2. Syntactical errors. In both groups most errors are caused by using analogically structures of NL in French. In this class there is a significant difference in the amount of influence of a third language, English: in SIL only 5 errors can be said to be influenced by English while in FIL the no. is 17.

SIL:

1. "Mais *quelque chose* qui m'irrite c'est..."
   Sw. Men *något/någonting* som irriterar mig är..."
   Fr. Mais *une chose* qui m'irrite c'est...
   The pronoun 'quelque chose' exists in French but cannot be used as an antecedent for this kind of a relative clause.

2. "J'aime les petites villes je crois *quand* on peut avoir beaucoup de maisons individuelles".
   Sw. equivalent for *quand* is 'när' or 'då' which both can be used either in temporal or in causal clauses.
   Fr. *parce que* because of the context.

3. "L e s f e m m e s veulent voir ça pour sortir de *sa vie* ordinaire".
   Sw. *sitt liv:* the possessive adjective must be in agreement with the word denoting what is possessed.
   Fr. *leur vie:* the possessive adjective of 3rd person plural must be 'leur'/ 'leurs'; 'sa' refers only to one person.

FIL:

1. "Il y a aussi *les gens* qui commencent *ses études*".
   Fi. On myös niitä, jotka aloittavat opinto*nsa*.
   Fr. *leurs études*.

In Finnish the possessive suffix is the same in singular and plural (of the word denoting the owner). As for French, the explanation of the previous example in SIL is valid here as well.

2. "Ma mère elle a soixante-cinq je crois".
   Fi. Äiti on 65 luulisin.
   Fr. Ma mère elle a soixante-cinq *ans* je crois.

In French a numeral alone can not be used to express the age of a person as can be done in spoken Finnish.

3. "*Alors* on mange il faut tuer pour manger".
   Fi. *Kun kerran* syö, täytyy tappaa syödäkseen.
   Fr. *puisque;* there is a confusion between a temporal and a causal conjunction evidently because in spoken Finnish 'kun' is mostly used for 'koska'.

The following example was found both in SIL and in FIL:

"C'est une question difficile à répondre'.

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English: *'It is a question difficult to answer at'.*
Fr. *Il est difficile de répondre à cette question.*

3. Prepositions. The following examples will illustrate how prepositions are used in an analogical way with NL.

SIL:
1. "Il faut qu'on *commence* très tôt *avec* l'entraînement".
   Sw. *börja med.*
   Fr. *commencer* with a direct object.

2. "J'aime aussi *de* nager".
   Sw. Jag tycker *om att* simma.
   Fr. J'aime aussi nager; without preposition.

3. "C'est quelque chose positive".
   Det är något positivt.
   Fr. C'est quelque chose *de* positif; an adjective postponed to a pronoun must be preceded by the preposition 'de'.

FIL:
1. "C'est près de Salo, soixante kilomètres de Turku".
   Fi. Se on lähellä Saloa, 60 km Turusta.
   Fr. *à* soixante kilomètres de Turku.

2. ".. où on peut conduire *avec* la voiture".
   Fi. .. jossa voi ajaa auto*lla.*
   Fr. .. où on peut *conduire la voiture;* with a direct object.

3. "Moi, j'étais aussi *dans* l'école."
   Fi. Minä olin myös koulu*ssa.*
   Fr. Moi, j'étais aussi *à* l'école.

The Finnish inessive case is often, but not always, translated by 'dans' in French, which has caused the overgeneralization of the equivalence.

4. Person. All instances of errors in the choice of person in a verbal phrase are cases in which singular is used for plural. In SIL this is natural considering the lack of personal endings in the paradigms of verbs. In FIL it is less natural unless the forms of spoken Finnish are taken into account: 'Ne tulee', 'ne tekee' in which plural and singular forms are differentiated only by the personal pronoun ('se'/'ne').

5. Mood. This is one of the most interesting cases dealt with in this paper: in FIL there are only 5 examples of omitted subjunctive form while in SIL there are 22 of them. As I have pointed out before, this does not imply that FIL is more correct in this respect but that SIL uses structures which demand the subjunctive mood, however, without realizing it actually, while FIL avoids them. This may imply that the Swedish-speaking students are one step ahead of the Finnish-speaking students in learning French. FIL is a form of "simple" French, not 'simplified' because it is not possible to simplify something you do not possess. The subjunctive mood exists in Swedish though it is not very frequently used; in Finnish there is no subjunctive mood.

SIL:

1. "Je ne peux pas m'imaginer pouvoir y vivre longtemps".
   Sw. Jag kan inte inbilla mig att kunna leva där länge.
   Fr. Je ne peux pas m'imaginer *que je puisse* y vivre longtemps.

In a subordinate clause after a negative form of a verb denoting perception or opinion, a process that is not real but a mental image requires the subjunctive mood.

2. "Il faut qu'on *est* très fort en quelque sport pour gagner beaucoup".
   Fr. Il faut qu'on *soit* très fort.., etc.

'Il faut que' is one of the verb syntagms that always require the subjunctive mood, but is very often used without it in students' language.

FIL:

1. "Je ne crois pas qu'il y *a* beaucoup".
   Fr. Je ne crois pas qu'il y en *ait* beaucoup.

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With verbs denoting negation, doubt, uncertainty etc., the subjunctive mood is required in French but very often omitted by students.

2. "J'espère qu'ils *sont* contents".
   Fr. J'espère qu'ils *soient* contents.

Verbs expressing feelings require the subjunctive mood in the following subordinate clause.

6. *Tense.* As for the use of tenses in general, the present indicative is by far the most common in both SIL and FIL. The cases of wrong choice of tense are mostly instances of the imperfect tense used instead of the perfect tense ('passé composé'). The use of the imperfect tense is parallel in Finnish and Swedish and different from that in French. Thus it is logical that the errors produced in SIL and FIL are similar.

SIL:
"J'*avais* ce chien parce que en enfant j'avais peur d'être seule à la maison."

Sw. Jag fick den dar hunden darfor att jag var radd for att vara hemma ensam.
Fr. J'*ai eu* le chien... etc.

FIL:
"*J'essayais* d'organiser une fête la semaine dernière".
Fi. Yritin järjestaa juhlat viime viikolla.
Fr. J'ai essayé d'organiser une fête la semaine dernière.

In French the imperfect tense is used to describe actions as background factors while the perfect tense is used to express what happens.

Conclusion

This study has been made to find out if there are any differences between French spoken by Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking students, especially in the errors they make. That is why I have used traditional classifications of errors and counted them. A quantitative analysis of differences in quality should give at least some kind of an idea of the extent of the inluence of the native language, even though in this special case it is more a question of plurilingualism than bilingualism and thus influence from other languages can be discovered as well.

The quantitative method has brought out the following points of divergence as to the accumulation of errors in FIL ans SIL: omission of the article in FIL, substitution and omission of pronouns in FIL, errors affecting the class of verbs in SIL, lexical interference of Finnish and English in FIL, syntactical interference of English in FIL and errors in the choice of mood in SIL.

What can be deduced is that the relative no. of errors caused by NL interference in FIL vs. SIL are reduced because of the plurilingual situation of language students in Finland (French could be FL_4 in Finland), and

— that there are other sources of errors than transfer, confirmed generally by linguists. I think that the tendency to economical use of the mental capacities is one factor even though the need to communicate should be urgent in a test situation,
— that there are noticeable differences between individual students as to their personalities, pointed out by Krashen,[8] which, however, means entering the field of psychology,
— that the better marks obtained by Swedish-speaking students cannot possibly be explained by the (lesser) no. of errors. I hope to find out where the real difference lies when the global study I am working at now will be accomplished.

As a final remark I would like to point out that the figures given in this paper must be taken as approximations.

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NOTES

1. Jocelyne Fernandez, p. 25
2. The oral test consists of a guided conversation on a given topic for approximately 10 minutes
3. Nils Erik Enkvist, p. 1
4. Grevisse 1973 and 1980.
5. Doca, p. 46 ff.
6. Ringbom & Palmberg
7. Doca, p. 92 ff
8. Krashen, p. 23. Personality factors are interrelated with motivation factors. Briefly, it is hypothesized that the self-confident or secure person will be more able to encourage intake and will also have a lower filter. Traits relating to s e l f - c o n f i d e n c e (lack of anxiety, out-going personality, self-esteem) are thus predicted to relate to second language acquisition.

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